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ABSTRACT

Small children are very imaginative, and teachers should provide varied experiences to encourage continued growth of their imaginations. Classroom instructional settings can be full of discovery and learning if teachers provide many prewriting opportunities that allow children to discover opportunities for writing. These experiences should cut across the curriculum and include writing, speaking, drawing, and listening to encourage children to make the best of both their imagination and their knowledge. Important tasks for teachers are helping students learn when to use knowledge and when to use imagination, when to talk, and when to listen. For example, children can be allowed to engage in many different kinds of handwriting activities, such as informal, personal, creative, and letter writing. Such activities can be used to teach children about appropriate choices--answering abstract questions can take concrete form; personal questions can stimulate creative responses; spontaneous events can inspire writing about classroom surroundings; the experiences of others (such as parents) can inspire children to live vicariously; and everyday experiences can provide endless themes for writing. Teachers should also be aware that varied writing topics require wider audiences, and provide children with outlets for writing for others. (Samples of children's writing occur throughout the document.) (SKC)

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Writing: An Experiential Approach

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WRITING: AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

"Your imagination, my dear fellow, is worth more than you can imagine." (Louis Aragon)

Children and their imaginations, rediscovering from real, tangible experiences, those things which already exist within their imaginations. Small children enter daily into a world of imagination where no task is impossible and no situation improbable. Imagination, an outlet through which to explore new and very real experiences.

> It is fat and it lives under water because it won't get cold. It has got two small legs. It has got a short tail that is black. I think it might grow into a shark or a whale.

This first-hand observation by a five year old is a marvelous example of learning at its best: exciting, full of unknowns to be explored and outcomes to be anticipated, encorporating both factual observation with imagination. As teachers we possess the means by which to provide varied experiences to encourage the continued growth of imagination. For it is the people of the world who continue to use their imaginations that are the great poets, artists, and song writers of our world. They have refused to let their world go stale. They bring an excitement to their lives and through the use of their imaginations and experiences they transform mundane activities into new and exciting experiences from which to learn.

Discovery and learning, the life of any classroom. Two items that encompass what school should be at its best. Items that have the capacity for generating innumerable writing experiences. Too often

the phase of prewriting is slighted in order to provide more time for other areas of the curriculum. Instead, the day should be integrated to provide opportunities for discoveries which will lead to writing. Education needs more time for discovery, open-ended experiences which involve choice. Experiences which give children time.

Children have much to say. Writing, speaking, drawing, listening, and playing are essential parts of the learning process. Each person experiences only a fraction of any time that he or she passes through. Children should be encouraged to use their time to its fullest potential by taking part of any experiences offered them.

Experiences do not occur in neat little packages with labels of history, geography, math, reading, or science. Experience involves choice which encourages children to use both their emotional and intellectual powers: to use both imagination and knowledge. The ability to choose wisely is a great tool, one that cannot be acquired without practice. But to choose there must also be knowledge, for a person can only choose what is in one's capacity to choose. So experiences should give children time to talk, listen and ponder - each interrelated with the other in order to expand knowledge and imagination and encourage wise choices.

Children can practice many types of handwriting during the course of a day: creative, informational, personal, or letter formation. For as many types of writing as there are, there are innumerable situations and experiences which can promote writing. The writing samples which follow have been taken from observed experiences in classrooms which employ the use of choice with children.

Peter, nine, was growing tomatoes in the classroom. The headmaster asked how long the bottle of liquid plant food was going to last.

> "Today is May 4th, and I worked out how long our bottle of Fison's Tomarite liquid fertilizer will last. You see, there is 8 fluid ounces in the bottle, and if you apply 3 1/8 fluid ounces to a gallon and then you apply a quarter of a gallon to each plant every 2 days, I worked it out that there was 64 divided by 8 fluid ounces. Now if you divide that by 3 you can make 21 1/3 gallons. Now if you use a gallon every two days, it's going to take up 42 2/3 days to use it all up. Now we got it on April 25th. Now 5 days have passed by so we'll have to subtract those 5 days from 42 2/3 days and you're going to have 37 2/3 days left of use in the bottle. Now if I add that on to May 4th you'll have to buy another bottle on June 13th at half past two, to be correct.

In this case the asking of one question stimulated a most thorough and creative response. Additionally, the abstract mathematical concept was examined and responded to in concrete form. Questions which relate to the child's personal experiences can stimulate thought, productivity, and written response.

Sometimes single pieces of prose or poetry are inspired by a topic of study, such as BOTTLES AND PEOPLE.

> See that bottle over there
> I don't want to be like it
> I can touch it and feel it
> But when I tip it up
> It's empty
> There's nothing in it - just air.
> People have shapes
> Alot like bottles.
> There's bulges and bottoms and mouths
> But it's what's inside them that counts.
> If they're kind and cheerful
> And friendly and good to be with
> And helpful and thoughtful
> These things seem to come out and never stop.
> If they're mean and nasty
> Don't care about you
> But only themselves
> They seem like empty bottles
> Full of nothing but air.

Writing about a unit of study, whether it be one of the child's choice, such as this eight year old's topic on bottles, or one

assigned by the teacher, can very easily be combined and bound into a book of the child's making.

Often accidental happenings are an excellent source of writing. A second grader found a leftover sandwich in her cubbyhole that had begun to grow fungus. Several children found this most interesting and three types of writing were the outcome of this indepth examination of moldy bread: descriptive, mathematical computation, and creative.

DESCRIBING THE FUNGUS

The fungus looks like a house with lots of hiding holes and it looks like a giant crisp and it smells like a chicken shack. I drew a piece of fungus and it felt like a soggy piece of bread.

WEIGHING AND MEASURING MY FUNGUS

My fungus weighs 800 grams.
The length along the top is 63 cm.
The length along the bottom is 61 cm.
Lengthways circumference is 94 cm.
The width across the top is 42 cm.
The width across the bottom is 27 1/2 cm.
The circumference width through is 66 1/2 cm.

THE LITTLE GNOME AND THE FUNGUS

One day a little gnome was looking for a home because he lived in a bird box and birds kept coming in. "So that's why I've left." Then he saw a hole in the ground, So he walked over to it and he went down the hole. It was dark so he got his lamp out and then he got a match out, then he saw two bright lights near the grey wall. Now Fred the gnome was getting frightened. Then his light went out. The gnome ran and ran until he was outside. He ran to a tree and got his hammer out and picked up a Shale Stone. He hammered the Stone into the tree so he could climb up away from the mouse. Then he saw the Fungus, so he walked over to the Fungus and he went inside. There were two spiders inside and a family of woodlice. The spider said "do you want to live here?"..

Rich experiences outside of the classroom also encourage the development of concepts and provide numerous opportunities for

children to write. The experiences of others make excellent topics:

> "My mum is the lollipop lady, and everyday she helps the children cross the road. And every morning she goes out at 1/2 past 8 and she puts on a big white coat and a green waistecoat and sometimes she puts her cap on and it is her birthday today. And when they are naughty she pretends to hit them with her lollipop or she puts her hat on them. She goes out dinner time too, and in the afternoon.

Children, such as this six year old, live vicariously through the experiences of adults as well as other children.

Finally, everyday experiences, those things which children know best, provide endless themes about which to write. Richard, who was six, wrote about having afternoon tea with his mother.

AFTERNOON TEA

> Yesterday I made some butter and I'll tell you how I made some. I asked my mum for some cream off some milk. I put it in a tupperwear flask and started to shake it. It was so exciting when I saw the top of the flask because on the top of the flask was, you guess - yes it was butter. Then I put some salt in it, and that is how I made butter. Butter makes luvlly buns and cakes. We poured the butter milk in a cup for our hamster, Fidgets. On farms the butter milk goes to the little pigs to make them fat. Later in the afternoon we made some scones too. We harvested some cress we had sown 10 days before I made some butter. We spread the butter and cress on our scones and then we had an afternoon tea

In writing such as Richard's, there is always room to explore areas related indirectly to those things which are known best. These areas can in turn generate further writing.

As teachers give children more and more opportunities to write, they need to be aware that a wider audience is needed than just the classroom teacher. Good teachers will provide this wider audience by allowing and encouraging children to share their work with other children, teachers, and administrators. The longer a teacher

practices this type of sharing, the easier it will become for both teacher and children to think about writing as an integrated part of the curriculum, an extension of fact and imagination.

The type of writing discussed here is not the type to be acquired from a classroom timetable with a certain section labeled "Writing." Writing of this calibre comes from open-ended experiences - experiences which involve choice, which build upon one another, and which know no restrictions. Words can only have meaning for children when they are charged with experiences.

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